

**Narco-Crime in Mexico: Indication of State Failure or Symptoms of an Emerging
Democracy?**

**A Monograph
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Abstract

Narco-Crime in Mexico: Indication of State Failure or Symptoms of an Emerging Democracy? by MAJ Juan P. Nava, US Army, 42 pages.

The increasing volume and manner of violent deaths in Mexico nearly doubled in 2009 to just over seven thousand. Mexico appears capable of devolving into a failed state status where an insurgency threat could potentially thrive. These indices depict Mexico as potentially very near collapse.

This monograph examines the contradiction among experts of Mexico and Latin America to determine whether the increased cross-border criminal violence reflects “an unintended side effect of democratization and economic globalization,” or a signal for the eventual failure of Mexico as a nation-state.

The monograph determines that Mexico will not fail. The violence along the US-Mexico border and within Mexico reflects a reaction by criminal organizations to the aggressive counter-narcotic policies enacted by President Calderón. President Calderón, having run for election as an anti-corruption conservative candidate, continues to pursue an aggressive policy as representative of the will of the people as expressed in free and fair elections after nearly 7 decades of single-party rule. Despite significant economic challenges and a deteriorating security situation in localized areas, the empirical evidence indicates that Mexico as a nation-state demonstrates clear national durability.

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Introduction

In January 2009, the retiring Director of Central Intelligence, General Michael Hayden, described the increasing violence in Mexico along the nearly two thousand mile United States (US) southern border as on par with Iran and greater than Iraq as the greatest potential threat to national security moving forward.¹ The 2008 Joint Operational Environment (JOE) document, United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM), coupled Mexico with Pakistan as the “worst case scenario” for US national security should either nation rapidly fail or collapse.²

The increasing volume and manner of violent deaths in Mexico, some especially gruesome, nearly doubled in 2009 to just over seven thousand.³ Reports of brutality and emerging accounts of venal government corruption add to the already negative general US popular perception of Mexico. Exacerbated by perceived schizophrenic and duplicitous American foreign, security and economic policies, Mexico appears capable of diverging into a failed state where a destabilizing insurgency threat could potentially thrive.⁴ These indices depict Mexico as potentially very near collapse.

In March of 2010, drug cartel gunmen assassinated US consulate staff employees and their spouses in the presence of their children in the middle of the day as they left a consulate

¹ Alex Newman, “U.S. Military Warns of Mexico’s Collapse,” *The New American*, <http://www.thenewamerican.com/world-mainmenu-26/north-america-mainmenu-36/691> (accessed March 16, 2010).

² United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operational Environment 2008*, November 2008.

³ United States Congressional Research Service, *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence*, February 10, 2010.

⁴ Gabriel Marcella, *American Grand Strategy for Latin America in the Age of Resentment*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007).

social event.⁵ In response, the US Secretaries of State, Defense, and Homeland Security joined the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of National Intelligence to conduct an impromptu Cabinet-level visit with their Mexican counterparts to strengthen relationships, and to ascertain how best to support the Mexican government's struggle with illicit drug organizations.

In contrast, while US experts on Mexico and Latin America identify weaknesses in specific areas they clearly articulate exceptional strengths in others. For example, Shannon O'Neil, the Director of the Independent Task Force on US Policy for Latin America of the US Council on Foreign Relations, even goes so far as to declare that Mexico will not fail in her recent *Foreign Affairs* article on the subject entitled "The Real War in Mexico." Citing Mexico's ability to meet the essential needs of the populace, hold free and fair elections legitimately, and exercise executive civilian control of the military, O'Neil recommends that the US recognize Mexico as "a permanent strategic partner, rather than an often-forgotten neighbor."⁶ Many of O'Neil's comments reflect the tensions between the two nations as artifacts of a long history of cooperation, competition and compromise while significant amounts of literature, largely written by Mexican Latinos, plead for the US to understand the conflicted relationship between nations.⁷

⁵ Julian Cardona, "Mexico Gunman Kill American Consulate Staff," Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62D19Q20100315> (accessed April 5, 2010).

⁶ For more information about the resiliency of the Mexican internal structural conditions and the effect of democratization on Mexico as they pertain to powerful drug cartels and US policy recommendations for resolution to these problems, see Shannon O'Neil's *Foreign Affairs* article entitled, "The Real War in Mexico," dated July/August 2009. Shannon O'Neil is a Douglas Dillon Fellow for Latin American Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

⁷ For more information about the history of the relationship between Latin America and the US with details about past conflicts, invasions and the current relationship between nations, see Kyle Longley, *In the Eagle's Shadow* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson Inc., 2002). To provide context about the current degraded relationship between the US and Latin America in general, see Gabriel Marcella *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Resentment* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007). Finally, to examine the troubled nature of the relationship today, see Jorge Dominguez and Rafael Fernandez de

Thesis Description

Is the increased cross-border criminal violence in Mexico evidence of impending state failure, or merely an unintended side effect of democratization? O'Neil claims that the current raised level of violence reflects "an unintended side effect of democratization and economic globalization," and not a signal for the eventual failure of Mexico as a nation-state. This monograph examines O'Neil's claims concerning the impact of democratization using descriptions of variables and applicable theories contributive to democracy and democratization as articulated by Samuel Huntington in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.⁸ The monograph also leverages Huntington's concepts of the emergence of political institutions within an environment of social change in *Political Order in Changing Societies* wherein he addresses the conditions upon which political institutions emerge.⁹

After exposing and adjudicating the arguments for and against the potential for failure, societal factors, and democratization, the monograph determines that Mexico will not fail. Further, the monograph concludes that the narco-criminal violence along the US-Mexico border and within Mexico reflect the reaction of criminal organizations to the intensifying efforts by aggressive counter-narcotic policies of President Calderón. President Calderón, having run for election successfully as an anti-corruption conservative candidate, continues to pursue aggressive policies perceived as representative of the will of the people expressed in free and fair elections from among multiple viable competing parties, including one that reigned for nearly 7 decades.

Castro *The United States and Mexico: Between Partnership and Conflict, Second Edition*. (New York: Rutledge, 2009).

⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 37-8.

⁹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 11.

Whether the artifacts of an emerging democracy or an indicator of a declining nation-state, this monograph supports a conclusion based on analysis of objective criteria. Despite significant economic challenges and a deteriorating security situation in localized areas, the empirical evidence, measured against failed state criteria and evaluated against democratization characteristics, indicates that Mexico as a nation-state retains national durability and strength. Not intended as a policy paper, this monograph does not provide recommended US policy solutions to the problems identified in Mexico.

Methodology

The monograph uses Robert Rotberg's articulated criteria for state failure found in his work, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*.¹⁰ Rotberg, the Director of the Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, posits that states are strong or weak "according to the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial political goods."¹¹ Rotberg's criteria for determining the strength or weakness of states include, in hierarchical order, the provision of security, a uniform application of the rule of law, the ability of the populace to participate in free and fair elections with the tolerance of divergent positions, and the provision of essential services such as education and medical aid.¹² The level at which states provide these political goods determine their "strength" or relative durability. Applying this criterion, this monograph will elucidate how or why Mexico meets or does not meet Rotberg's criteria. Though the criteria contain hierarchal weighting in Rotberg's work, the assessment of each condition in a

¹⁰ Robert Rotberg. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

dichotomous fashion more clearly illustrates them as indicators of Mexico's strength or weakness.

In assessing the presence of or lack of democratization, the monograph highlights the elements of the previously described characteristics attributed to Samuel Huntington. Huntington discusses concepts of political modernization as a rationalization of authority, differentiation of political functions, and the increased participation in politics of social groups throughout society.¹³ The monograph will assess how political modernization effected the democratization of Mexico and the subsequent power and influence assumed by Presidents within the last decade.

Finally, the assessment will leverage the comprehensive list of key characteristics of "young" democracies provided by Ethan Kapstein, Professor of Sustainable Development at the Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires (INSEAD) alongside Nathan Converse, Research Assistant at the London School of Economics, in their book, *The Fate of Young Democracies*.¹⁴ Kapstein and Converse argue that young democracies emerge in the presence of challenging social-economic conditions often in an environment where politicians lack credibility and characterized by institutional weaknesses such as ineffectual political parties and volatile economic performance more likely to receive or need foreign aid.¹⁵

The monograph compares the empirical evidence surrounding the arguments for and against state failure and the emerging properties of democratization. The examination of the evidence will support the determination of what the narco-criminal violence actually indicates.

¹³ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 34.

¹⁴ Ethan Kapstein and Nathan Converse. *The Fate of Young Democracies*. (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2-5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Mexico – An Overview

To enable an objective evaluation and to provide understanding of the current complex conditions within Mexico requires relevant background information concerning select operational variables within Mexico.¹⁶ In order to understand and assess the strength or weakness of Mexico as a state, one must comprehend not just the internal complexities of social, political, or government systems, but also have an awareness of historical influences from which the current conditions derive. This background provides a contextual reference point for those relatively unfamiliar with Mexico.

For over seven decades since 1929, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, dominated Mexican politics enjoying a political hegemony in what Jorge Castaneda, then a prolific academic professor and future presidential candidate, characterized in a 1986 article in *Foreign Affairs* as “just enough democracy: elections, at least in name; a degree of tolerance for most forms of opposition; and just enough authoritarianism: electoral fraud; silencing excessive criticism of the president; cooptation, corruption and repression, in that order, of the insufficiently loyal opposition.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Operational variables allow for the categorization and description of influencing elements in a logical manner. For a description of operational variables as a tool for understanding the contemporary operating environment, see the article by COL Stephen Banach and Dr. Alex Ryan. “The Art of Design: A Design Methodology,” in *Military Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, No.2 (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Combined Arms Center, 2008), 105-15.

¹⁷ For more information about Mexican politics within the mid-1980s see Jorge Castaneda’s article “Mexico at the Brink,” in the Winter 1985/86 version of *Foreign Affairs*. Castaneda would later serve as Foreign Minister, a position his father once held, for President Vincente Fox from 2000 to 2003 and resign after controversy that he spied for Cuba and maintained communist tendencies.

Mexican politics largely resembled the subliminally oppressive conditions described by Marina Ottaway in *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*.¹⁸ In fact, Mexico endured what Samuel Huntington described as a one party authoritarian regime whose success he attributes to the consistent rotation of new leadership within the party.¹⁹ Huntington asserts that this rotation of leadership provided necessary stability as leaders within the single party hope to one day have the opportunity to ascend next to the mantle of power. This tempered ambition kept potential political opponents in line. Officials within the PRI evolved into political operatives beholden to, and in the service of, powerful drug cartel leaders and demonstrated excessive corruption to enable cartel activity. Additionally, the public dissatisfaction with government heightened in reaction to a seemingly impotent and lazy response to the provision of necessary essential services to Mexican citizens in the wake of a massive earthquake that severely damaged Mexico City in 1985.²⁰

The center-right conservative National Action Party, or PAN, a Christian democratic party established with the help of the very influential Roman Catholic Church, leveraged Mexican distrust for the PRI and campaigned on promises of social and economic reform. The move towards a center-right leadership reflected a resurgence of conservatism, both social and economic, intended to thwart the deteriorating security conditions. The election of President Vicente Fox, with over forty-two percent of the vote, legitimized a true multi-party election at the national level. Mexico finally emerged as a truly democratic polity. The election exemplified what Samuel Huntington described as the central procedure of democracy “...the election of

¹⁸ Marina Ottaway describes the election, communication, and political characteristics of supposed democratic societies who have authoritarian propensities in *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

¹⁹ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 48.

²⁰ In depth information available concerning the rise of the PAN in Roderic Ai Campo's *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Consolidation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

leaders through competitive election by the people governed.”²¹ Therefore, the legitimately contested second party political option established the true “democratization” of Mexico.²² Feeding on independent variables and structural conditions²³ outlined by Huntington’s work, recent Mexican democratization evolved from an acute rise in populace fatigue over the corruptive relationships between government officials and illicit narcotics cartel leaders.

The PAN promised conservative reformation consistent with economic viability largely tied to the much wealthier United States economy through the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The PAN successfully won many municipal, state, and national elections in 2000. Empowered by the election results, Fox embarked on an agenda of center-right reforms intending to address corruption while engendering economic stability and improvement.²⁴

Seeming to capitalize on Fox’s success, and in a global environment after the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent initiation of wars both in Afghanistan and Iraq, Felipe Calderón entered Presidential office in 2006 despite a disputed election fraught with claims of irregularities and alleged voter fraud.²⁵ The United States moved its international focus overseas

²¹ Ibid., 6.

²² For additional information about the democratization of Mexico, see Julia Preston and Sam Dillon’s *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2004). Preston and Dillon are NY Times correspondents responsible for Mexico in the close of the 1990s. Their work discusses the emergence of the PAN resulting in Fox’s eventual election.

²³ For more information about structural conditions and independent variables as they relate to the state, see Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, Oxford University Press, New Series, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Oct., 2004), 563-95.

²⁴ For a detailed description of the relationship between President Vicente Fox and President George W. Bush highlighting the complicated nature of their efforts to improve relations between the nations see the retrospective testimonial book by Jeffrey Davidow, then the US Ambassador to Mexico, entitled, *The US and Mexico: The Bear and the Porcupine* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publications, 2004).

²⁵ For detailed information about the 2006 Mexican election, statistics, and campaign issues see Debra Sabia and Vincent Kohler “The 2006 Mexican Presidential Election: Democratic Development or

after the September 11th attacks. It did not help that Fox openly disagreed with US foreign policy and the war in Iraq. The US did not focus as much effort or resources on the counter-narcotic strategic partnership with Mexico until the Merida Initiative became law in June of 2008.

The Merida Initiative established a multi-year program largely as a support agreement with heavy investment in counter-drug forces especially in Mexico. Congress approved nearly \$1 billion over the past two years with another \$450 million scheduled for 2010 targeted to support Mexico in its struggle against illegal drug organizations.²⁶ The US held up recent payments based upon alleged Mexican human rights violations. Payments resumed once Secretary of State Hillary Clinton certified that human rights conditions met “acceptable” standards.²⁷ The uptick in violence and the increasing impact on border states obviously helped to push the issue in favor of assisting Mexico with nominal nods to the accusations.

Upon his election, President Calderón declared a war on drug trafficking and the highly influential drug cartels. To this end, he deployed over 35,000 Mexican Armed Forces troops to various areas to combat what he declared as a threat to Mexican national stability.²⁸ These deployments place tremendous strain on the Mexican military. However, the military continues to bear the burden of eradication, interdiction, and law enforcement operations while the Mexican Federal Police undergo needed reforms caused by high-level corruption and overall

Democratic Debacle?” *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, Spring 2008. Debra Sabia is a professor of Political Science with a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. Vincent Kohler is a professor of American Studies with a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. Both currently teach at Georgia Southern University and were visiting professors at the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Mexico during the 2006 presidential election.

²⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Factsheet: Merida Initiative*, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/fs/122397.htm>, 2009, (accessed December 1, 2009).

²⁷ Amnesty International, *Annual Report: Mexico*, 2009.

²⁸ Jorge Castaneda, “Mexico’s War of Choice,” Project Syndicate, December 18, 2009: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/castaneda27/English>, (accessed March 17, 2010).

dysfunction.²⁹ The Mexican Army continues to enjoy a high confidence rating among the population. However, these military operations, though marginally successful against the powerful drug cartels, have failed to influence the correlative relationship between the disenfranchised and desperately poor towards illicit methods as a means to provide an acceptable standard of living for themselves and their families, or to get rich quick.³⁰

His own political influence challenged by sub-national malign actors, para-state organizations, and illicit drug cartels, President Calderón applied a heavy hand in large military and police deployments to bring the threatening drug organizations to heel.³¹ President Calderón's administration and his political party took major hits when the PRI doubled their elective gains in the lower house of the national government during the most recent mid-term elections in July of 2009. President Calderón also encountered exceptional scrutiny concerning decisions of Mexican economic policy during the global economic crisis of 2008-2009. Exacerbated by the global epidemic of the H1N1, or "swine," flu allegedly originating in Mexico, large sectors of the Mexican economy absorbed massive losses estimated at 8 percent of GDP for 2009.³² Calderón will likely absorb much of the PRI platform attempting to mitigate the political damage ahead of his re-election bid, though he continues to appear unwilling to compromise on the counter-drug position. According to the *Economist*, the political losses have virtually rendered

²⁹ Stephen Meiners and Fred Burton, "The Role of the Mexican Military in the Cartel War," *STRATFOR*, July 2009, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090729_role_mexican_military_cartel_war (accessed March 17, 2010).

³⁰ Center for Latin American and Border Studies, "The Mexican Military's Role in Crime Ridden Border Areas," (Las Cruces: New Mexico State University, 2009).

³¹ James Roberts, "The United States Must Help Mexico Defeat Narco-Insurgencies." *CATO Unbound*, entry posted August 10, 2009, <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/08/10/james-roberts/the-us-must-help-mexico-defeat-narco-insurgencies/> (accessed December 2, 2009).

³² "Hoping for the Best: Mexico's Economy is Mired in Recession," *The Economist*. (August 2009).

Calderón a “lame duck” for the remainder of his present term. They say that he also “no longer has the political influence to produce the necessary macro-economic reforms necessary to effect enough change to influence his re-election bid.”³³ This bodes ill for him as the economy dominates the Mexican political landscape while the nation, like so many others, deal with the global economic conditions.

With respect to Mexico nationally, the most recent recession represents a reversal of fortune from previous economic crises. As a part of a global economic recession and previous strides at globalization with interdependence between economies necessarily created as a byproduct of NAFTA, the US economic recession caused a severe economic recession in Mexico. Combined with enormous losses of tourism income, a result of the H1N1 “swine flu” pandemic, several key economic indicators, most specifically, the reduction in the GDP of 9.7 percent, reflect a severe decline in 2009.³⁴

Mexican politics also includes the viable national third Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD, as an offshoot of the PRI with key players migrating to the new party reflecting a more liberal/progressive political ideology. The PRD continues to attract neo-liberals largely concerned with economic equity among the population. In the wake of decades of elections wrought with rampant and consistent fraud, the people of Mexico have little faith in the political process. According to Dan Lund, President of the MUND Americas Group of Mexico City, nearly 48 percent of Mexican respondents surveyed characterized the election of 2006 as

³³ “Mexico’s Embattled President: Calderón Tries Again,” *The Economist* (Sep 2009). Mexico City.

³⁴ “Mexico’s Economy: A Different Kind of Recession,” *The Economist* (Nov 2009), Mexico City.

“not honest” though the survey provides no indication of how this perception affected the outcome of the election.³⁵

Peter Andreas, the Director of the International Relations Program at the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, and Ethan Nadelmann, the founder and Executive Director of the Drug Policy Alliance, argue that criminalization of “societal norms” play influential roles in an environment of “transnational moral entrepreneurs,” while addressing impact or influence of cross-border crime on international relations in their book, *Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations*.³⁶ Andreas and Nadelmann describe the complexity of the criminal problem in Mexico well in the following excerpt,

Criminal laws and international prohibition regimes are particularly ineffective in suppressing criminal activities that require limited and readily available resources and no particular expertise to commit, those that are easily concealed, those that are unlikely to be reported to the authorities, and those for which the consumer demand is substantial, resilient, and not readily substituted for by alternative activities or products.³⁷

The limited resources of the Mexican security apparatus, receiving only .5 percent of GDP annually, the clandestine nature of the illegal activity within a criminal network so ingrained within the society as to likely prevent reporting, and the high US consumer demand all serve to complicate the operating environment.³⁸

³⁵ Dan Lund, “Moving Toward 2009 without leaving 2006,” *Opinion and Policy Report, Series 8*. (Mexico City, MUND Americas: 2009).

³⁶ Peter Andreas and Ethan Nadelmann, *Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Mexico,” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html?countryName=Mexico&countryCode=mx®ionCode=na&rank=12#mx>, (accessed March 16, 2010).

Longstanding US ethnocentrism continues to energize calls for immigration reform with charged terms such as illegal “aliens” and glamorized “grassroots” citizen movements like the “Minutemen.” This depiction contributes to what Leo Chavez refers to as “The Latino Threat Narrative.” Chavez describes this narrative as only the most recent to follow a litany of such threats as “the German language threat, the Catholic threat, the Chinese and Japanese immigration threats, and the southern and eastern European threat.” Chavez argues that the “Latino Threat,” as depicted by a biased media dictated by groups such as the Minutemen, lacks justification and will not materialize in history.³⁹ The hypersensitivity on both sides of the issue of the illegal presence of Mexican citizens in the United States may enable the acceptability and support of Mexicans to participate in the exportation of drugs into what they perceive as a subjugating US society. Most Mexican immigrants love their country. Their pull towards the US stems from the economic opportunities available to them.

Competing Mexican drug cartel organizations wage what Hal Brands terms a “narco-insurgency” on a national scale in large portions of the Mexican rural population areas, often using mercenary paramilitary forces.⁴⁰ Motivated by economic greed and a desire to exert dominate influence, these opportunistic organizations leverage the devolving structural conditions, such as increasing poverty and high unemployment, with large nodal criminal systems that transcend judicial authority with minimal deterrence indicated by elevated rates of recidivism.⁴¹ The declining social structural conditions, largely influenced by a global economic recession, indicate a current propensity of the populace towards the proxy governance controlled

³⁹ Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ Hal Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy” (Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2009).

⁴¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Drug Policy Information Clearing House: Fact Sheet”. March 2003.

by narco-criminal elements at least at the regional or state level. Lacking a desired political outcome, save for a weak judiciary or executive, these criminal organizations have no interest in national or federal level governance inclusive of the spectrum of essential services required by the people.

Understanding the conditions in Mexico provides a backdrop setting with context that now enables a further discussion of how these conditions and factors contribute to an environment where drug cartel organizations successfully thrive just outside, or at times purposefully within, the reach of the Mexican judicial and political systems. Though not an all-inclusive description of the various elements of Mexico, the provided information characterizes the political goods relative to Rotberg's measure of state strength and the conditions wherein, or as a result of, political modernization associated with democratization as addressed by Huntington.

Security - Gangs, Cross-Border Crime, and Transnational Terrorism

Robert Rotberg identifies security as the primary political good that any government of a state must provide to its people, calling it the state's "prime function."⁴² He defines security as the means

to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion.⁴³

⁴² Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

The sharp rise in criminal violence in the northern regions of Mexico and the border states of the United States clearly demonstrate a declining security condition in accordance with this definition. This section provides a discussion of three elements that challenge the principles of Rotberg's definition in Mexico; gangs, cross-border crime (i.e. smuggling, kidnapping, etc.), and transnational terrorism. Discussing, defining, and describing these potentially destabilizing elements facilitate the follow-on contrasting, by point and counter-point, why Mexico will and why it will not fail as a state.

Gangs, like Los Zetas, represent the most formidable para-military force to truly threaten the stability of Mexico and proliferate the exportation of violent transnational terrorism to the United States.⁴⁴ The organization takes the name from the federal police radio code for the force pursuing the original leader, Arturo Guzman Decenas. A lieutenant in the elite Army Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFES), Decenas convinced thirty others to desert the Mexican military with him to protect the then leader of the Gulf drug cartel, Osiel Cardenas Guillen.⁴⁵ These commandos received exceptional training reportedly from Israel as well as some European nations, but most notably from the US Army Special Forces. Their exceptional skills range from ambushes and intelligence collection to counter-surveillance techniques and prisoner rescues as they easily overmatch the federal police and the average Mexican soldier.⁴⁶ Better equipped and armed, many Zetas competently wield large caliber automatic weapons, surface to air missiles,

⁴⁴ The most comprehensive collection of information concerning the powerful and influential drug organizations in Mexico appear in George Grayson's *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers: 2009). Grayson presents detailed charts that compare and describe the organizations, their fragmentation, and their self-organizing emergent properties.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 179-197.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and high-tech communications equipment compared to the often-austere capabilities of the Mexican security forces.⁴⁷

After the Mexican government arrested and extradited the Gulf cartel leader (Cardenas) to the US, the elaborate intelligence and communications scheme of the Zetas began to evolve. The Mexican Federal Police and the Mexican Army killed or arrested many of the original thirty-one Zetas. With the loss of key experience and leadership, younger, less well-trained members fill the gap. In reaction to this situation, Los Zetas now reportedly employ ex-Kaibiles, elite Guatemalan Special Forces, to improve training on tactics and weapons/equipment employment.⁴⁸ The Kaibiles renowned toughness and exceptional expertise in counter-insurgency tactics provide the essential military kinetic training advantage to the more ruthless younger generation of Los Zetas, also known as “The New Zetas,” or “Nuevo Zetas.” With training “bases” now across the Mexican and Guatemalan maps, Los Zetas proliferate both nationally and internationally.⁴⁹

Coerced by threats and abusive treatment, or enticed by economic opportunity, young men from the Army and elite police forces continue to desert to Los Zetas and other cartel organizations seeking a better life. The seemingly continuous infighting between cartels and government forces cultivated well-seasoned, experienced forces with honed exceptional fighting capability. Mexican government forces supported by US government agency enablers and funding, continue to struggle for the upper hand as counter-narcotic tactics assume a faint

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For more information about the Kaibiles, see the *STRATFOR* article entitled, “Kaibiles: The New Lethal Force in the Mexican Drug Wars,” 2006.

⁴⁹ Sam Logan, “The Evolution of ‘Los Zetas’, A Mexican Crime Organization,” *The International Relations and Security Network*, 11 March 2009.

counter-insurgency flavor.⁵⁰ Given the highly competitive microcosm of illicit drug organizations vying for dominate influence and power, other cartels emerged with similar ruthless and dangerous capabilities with names like “La Familia.” The cartels advantaged complex connections in Central and South America with the inter-cities and border regions of the US.⁵¹ The importance of the transcontinental connection should not go underestimated.

The most comprehensive illustration of the complexity and severity of drug related violence and the cartel structures in Mexico appear in George Grayson’s *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*⁵² Grayson, a Professor of Government at the College of William and Mary and well-respected associate scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) with several published works concerning Mexico, takes great effort to describe the illicit environment long enabled by both passive and active political support, the evolution of which circumvents authority, but fails to answer the question posed in his book’s title. Though providing a wealth of facts concerning the drug cartels, Grayson only implies a decline of Mexican strength with cautionary prose as recommendations to Mexico on how to avoid failure.⁵³ A solid exposition of the narco-violence problem, unfortunately Grayson’s work provides very little in recommended solutions.

On February 10, 2010, the Congressional Research Service published a report (R41075) entitled *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence*. In

⁵⁰ For more information about the internal drug party escalation and the development of the powerful drug cartels joined with corrupt Mexican political support, see Shannon O’Neil’s *Foreign Affairs* article entitled, “The Real War in Mexico,” dated July/August 2009.

⁵¹ Josh Meyer, “Probe of Mexican Drug Cartels Leads to Hundreds of US Arrests,” *Los Angeles Times* (Oct 2009).

⁵² For detailed information about the many cartels operating in Mexico, to include tabled figures of leaders, politicians, gang networks and narrative histories see George Grayson’s recently published work, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers: 2009) 179-217.

⁵³ Ibid.

this report, the researchers unequivocally categorized Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTO) as transnational organized crime groups. The report simply articulates the geographic situation. Mexico sits right between the largest narcotic drug producer, Colombia, and the largest narcotic drug user, the United States.⁵⁴ Oversimplified, the report does little other than state the geographical obvious.

Fred Burton, Vice President for Counterterrorism and Corporate Security, and Ben West, both from STRATFOR Global Intelligence, a strategic forecasting company based in Austin, Texas, assessed the transnational network of the drug cartel system reflecting the complexity and inter-relative elements of what they metaphorically compare to the United Postal Service. Figure 1 from their article “When the Mexican Drug Trade Hits the Border,” depicts the flow of drugs in and through the illicit drug system of Mexico from Central and South American sources as well as from sources across the Pacific in Asia.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ United States Congressional Research Service, *Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence*, February 10, 2010, 5.

⁵⁵ Fred Burton and Ben West, “When the Mexican Drug Trade Hits the Border,” Global Security and Intelligence Report, *STRATFOR*, April 2009.



(Figure 1. Cartel Territories and Drug Routes)

Nikos Passas, Professor of Criminology at Northeastern University, defines cross-border crime as “conduct which jeopardizes the legally protected interests in more than one national jurisdiction and which is criminalized in at least one of the states/jurisdictions concerned.”⁵⁶ In describing this phenomenon, Passas includes terrorism alongside other crimes that emerge because of increasing globalization. As an infringement on national sovereignty that undermines Rotberg’s political good of security, understanding this phenomenon should dominate US Homeland Security concerns to determine whether the threat presents significant risk to US or Mexican national stability.

When discussing the violence and criminal organizations in Mexico and the Southwest Border (SWB) region of the United States, occasionally the concept or term “narco-insurgency”

⁵⁶ Nikos Passas, “Cross Border Crime and the interface between legal and illegal actors,” *Upper World and Under World in Cross-Border Crime* (Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2002), 13.

emerges. Hal Brands spends significant time characterizing the events within the past few years as evidence of a narco-insurgency.⁵⁷ The Department of Defense, Joint Publication, defines an insurgency as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion or armed conflict.”⁵⁸ The US Army further expands on this concept attributing a distinction between an insurgency and other decisions as the “use of violence to achieve political goals.”⁵⁹

Unless Brands argues that the cartel organizations in Mexico seek limited political anarchy sufficient to facilitate their monetary or other self-serving purposes, he misapplies the term according to Army doctrine by implying that the cartel organizations amount to an insurgency movement or that a terrorist environment exists in Mexico to invoke the need for counterinsurgency tactics and methods for resolution. The cartels have no desire to replicate the delivery of political goods provided by the state. This kind of faddish and convenient labeling enables erroneous application of terms like insurgency to the criminal environment. Terms such as “criminal insurgency” only provide convenient categorization intended to add weight and impact to criminal activity in a post-September 11th perspective. Organized crime syndicates have operated for thousands of years desiring only economic gain, not a reform of political or even social order within a state. At best, criminal activity represents both an enabler to insurgent activities or a line of operation within a construct designed to demonstrate counterinsurgent weakness.

⁵⁷ Brands, “Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy.”

⁵⁸ United States Joint Forces Command, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms” *Joint Publication 1-02*, 2001, 265.

⁵⁹ United States Army, “Tactics in Counterinsurgency,” *Field Manual 3-24.2*, 2009, 1-1.

David Galula identifies the basic requirements necessary for a successful insurgency in his work, *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice*, long recognized as foundational to US Counterinsurgency doctrine.⁶⁰ Of the four main elements required, Galula emphasizes the need for an insurgency to have a cause. Though the financing of drug trading presents the economic purpose and motivation for belligerents and imposes an extremely responsive judiciary, no empirical evidence exists to indicate that belligerent cartel organizations desire to fulfill the requirements of the populace and meet their essential needs. Aside from an absence of governing authority, or a governing authority amenable to their wants, drug cartels have little desire to engage, overtly, in the political process. Their motivation, or “cause” centers on a need for economic freedom of movement or at least enough anarchical characteristics to facilitate their further conduct of illegal activities without impunity beyond the influence of the state.

Marc Sageman’s *Understanding Terror Networks* discusses the subject of terror networks well, but admittedly, he centers his discussion on the concepts of a Salafi Jihad.⁶¹ Perhaps the most inclusive analysis concerning terrorism networks appears in Ethan Bueno de Mesquita’s article, *Terrorist Factions*, in the Third Quarter edition, 2008 for the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*.⁶² This threat centrifugally exerts influence into the US and directly subjugates our

⁶⁰ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 17-42.

⁶¹ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁶² Ethan Bueno de Mesquita. “Terrorist Factions,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* (2008), 399-418. This model, found in the appendix of his work, contains higher-level mathematical equations with immeasurable psychosocial variables not easily understood by the non-political scientist.

southern border homeland defense efforts.⁶³ An understanding of terrorist networks as they relate to insurgencies highlights that the drug cartels have no interest in insurgency.

Many writings, “studies,” and speculative research explore terrorism and terrorist organizations, though no commonly agreed upon definition exists. This monograph uses the military doctrinal definition as, “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”⁶⁴ Those who use terrorism as a tactic or means are therefore referred to as terrorists. Clearly, given the manner of killings and nature of attacks, assassinations and coercive intimidation, the drug cartels in Mexico utilize terrorist tactics though the terrorism exemplifies means to an economic end versus a phase within an insurgency.

Why Mexico Will Fail

The primary systemic weakness of Mexico centers on its inability both to secure its citizens and to extend authority over its sovereign terrain. High casualty counts and spectacular methods of attack or murder affect large regions of northern Mexico. The cross-border transnational crime spillover into the US demonstrates the improved ability of illegal organizations to operate with relative impunity. In large portions of the country, the cartels provide a responsive “judiciary,” a means for economic support, and individual personal protection for active supporters. Unchecked, the cartels wield significant regional influence

⁶³ For further information about ill-structured problems, see section 1-3, “Operational Problems,” *TRADOC PAM 525-5-500, Commander’s Appreciation for Campaign Design* (Fort Monroe: Department of the Army, 2008), 8-12.

⁶⁴ United States Joint Forces Command, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms” *Joint Publication 1-02*, 2001.

through intimidation and other coercive means that threaten or circumvent the existing social order.⁶⁵

Discussing the metrics of troop/police deployments, murders, attacks and violence measure the mathematics of security conditions, but they cannot measure the psychological phenomenon. Do the people feel secure? Bruce Schneier, a leading expert on security in his essay, “The Psychology of Security,” highlights the duality between feeling secure and actually being secure.⁶⁶ Polling, an inexact metric, conducted by Gallup Consulting in February of 2009 indicated that Mexicans increasingly felt less secure.⁶⁷ Polling data conducted by MUND Americas in Mexico City also confirms this statement from a Mexican source.⁶⁸ Though the majority of Mexicans have a highly unfavorable view of the cartel organizations, they perceive their government as unable to do anything about the illegal narcotic activity.

Those who think that Mexico will fail cite several symptoms that correlate to the state’s decline, especially in the security realm. Grayson provides perhaps the most succinct argument for the decline of Mexico to a possible “failed” status. Grayson argues that President Calderón’s current counter-drug strategy actually triggered the displacement of malign actors throughout Mexico. By agitating the narcotics organizations, Calderón caused the current eruption of violence as the displaced malign actors seek to recover and reestablish their operations, influence,

⁶⁵ For more information about how the cartels operating in Mexico created a shadow social order see George Grayson’s recently published work, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 251-264.

⁶⁶ Bruce Schneier. “The Psychology of Security.” Bruce Schneier. <http://www.schneier.com/essay-155.html> (accessed March 2, 2010).

⁶⁷ Gallup, “Opinion Briefing: Mexico’s War on Drug Traffickers,” Gallup Consulting, February 18, 2009: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/115210/opinion-briefing-mexico-war-drug-traffickers.aspx>, (accessed March 16, 2010).

⁶⁸ Dan Lund, “Moving Toward 2009 without leaving 2006,” *Opinion and Policy Report, Series 8*.(Mexico City: MUND Americas, 2009).

or status. Relocated, these malign actors now spread their illicit organizations establishing systems that further complicate existing cellular organizational structures into more remote ungoverned spaces. According to Army doctrine, an actor is “an individual or group within a social network who acts to advance personal interests.”⁶⁹ In this context, malign actors follows accepted military conventions to describe actors with malevolent purposes or intentions.

These malign actors leverage the porous northern border while continuing to facilitate and engender cross-border relationships from powerful drug networks in South America to the distributors and “down-flow” actors supplying the high demand market in the US.⁷⁰ Highly elaborate “third generation” gang networks not only distribute, market, and sell illegal narcotics, but also export violence and intimidation as satellite networks for Mexican cartels in what Max Manwaring, Professor of Military Strategy at the US Army War College, calls Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO).⁷¹

Discussing Mexico specifically, Manwaring describes the Mexican gangs, with ties to Central American “Maras,” as having what he calls an erosive effect on the Mexican state. The term “Maras” translates as gangs, especially from the ruthless network of El Salvadoran and Central American gangs. These gangs, originating from Los Angeles, California, have a history of ruthless violence whose network evolved to include nodes in Central America as a result of deportations of violent actors. The network includes such gangs as MS-13, also known as “Mara Salvatrucha,” and MS-18, also known as the 18th street gang.

⁶⁹ US Army, “The Operations Process,” *Field Manual 5-0*, 3-9.

⁷⁰ George Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State*, 35-7.

⁷¹ Max Manwaring provides a detailed description of the use and emergence of third generation gangs in *A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil* (monograph, Strategic Studies Institute: United States Army War College: 2007), 5-7.

To support his description of the Mexican police as either coerced or intimidated, Manwaring points to the increased murder rate with emphasis on the murder and decapitation of police. Manwaring couples this ineffective police force along with prevalent political corruptions as attributive to the erosion of the Mexican state as gangs, cartel organizations, or “para-state” organizations create and fill “ungoverned spaces.”⁷²

Peter Andreas addressed the issue and complexity of border security and the “loss of control narrative” in *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide*. “The stress on loss of control understates the degree to which the state has actually structured, conditioned, and even enabled (often unintentionally) clandestine border crossings, and overstates the degree to which the state has been able to control its borders in the past.”⁷³ Andreas argues that the smuggler and the state have a mutually dependent relationship. The smuggler only exists because the state pursues him. Conversely, the state only pursues the smuggler, because he smuggles. Though in the case of Mexico, likely all overt efforts to combat drugs intend to appease wealthy northern neighbors whose example of assistance to Colombia shows what “fighting” drugs will get you. As an example, President Salinas likely took aggressive measures to attack the illicit drug industry largely in order to secure US approval of NAFTA.⁷⁴ This seemingly indefatigable cyclical system creates social and political apathy that translates to depressed voter participation.

Mexico’s inability to secure its northern border reflects ineptitude, apathy, or impotence. Whichever way, the general disregard for cross border infiltrations into and from Mexico

⁷² Ibid., 28-32.

⁷³ Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 7.

⁷⁴ Andreas explores how Salinas attacked the drug issue as a primary means of courting and securing US support for NAFTA. The Andreas argument expands to describe the smuggler/state and escalation/corruption internal tensions. For more information concerning the complexity of policing the US-Mexico border, look to Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide*, 58-9.

provides a direct challenge to US efforts to maintain sovereignty. Departing Mexico into the United States does not violate Mexican societal norms or laws and generally enjoys general acceptance among Mexican citizens. Aside from an unwillingness to secure their northern border, Mexican authorities equally fail to secure southern borders with Guatemala and Belize. Remnant elements of disenfranchised Guatemalans after the long and bloody civil war, either former Kaibiles or members of insurgent elements such as the Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre or MR-13, a leftist movement in Guatemala, find refuge or employment across Mexico with relative impunity. These insurgents differ from the Mara Salvatrucha gangs of El Salvador previously mentioned.

In addition to the trending increase in violent deaths, Mexico currently struggles to provide a reactive polity answerable to the desires of the population. Though Vicente Fox swept into office on the great hopes of Mexicans, breaking the long held semi-authoritarian one party reign, claims of fraud and political manipulations cloaked the subsequent presidential and provincial elections in a stigma of illegitimacy and general voter apathy.⁷⁵ Political activists in the PRI and PRD parties leverage the existing security instability towards their own gains, though the perceptive populaces still recall the enabling relationship between these parties and the illicit cartels.

The undercurrent of structural conditions, most involving negative economic indicators such as the disproportionate distribution of wealth, unemployment, and the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), create a fiscal environment with the potential for increased instability.⁷⁶ With high poverty figures, both foods based (18.2 percent) and asset based (> 47

⁷⁵ Dan Lund, "Moving Toward 2009 without leaving 2006," *Opinion and Policy Report, Series 8* (Mexico City, MUND Americas: 2009).

⁷⁶ "Mexico's Economy: A Different Kind of Recession," *The Economist* (Nov 2009). Mexico City.

percent), Mexican citizens continue to look north for financial support and opportunity.⁷⁷ Though the high percentages of poverty have no causal relationship with participation in illicit activity, in Mexico it does provide correlative reason to the perceived apathy of Mexican officials in failing to secure the northern border.

In summation, the propensity of the Mexican state appears inclined to further erosion and weakening with a general lack of security, apathetic electorate, and undermined national institutions of economy and governance. Unable to prevent invasions and infiltrations, Mexico joins a community of nations to include the US with an ineffective sovereign border. The depth of the illicit community in Mexican society complicates the elimination of this community whose tentacles extend to the legitimate. The great failure of Mexico to prevent, to protect against, and to prosecute crime threatens human security. This lack of a sense of security depresses voter turnout within the electorate, enables corruptive political forces, and does little to proliferate truly democratic principles.

Why Mexico Will Not Fail

The primary strengths of Mexico preventing state failure include the principles of a representative democracy with the capacity for fair elections, a capable and largely professionalized military/security force structure responsive to civilian constituted authority, a judiciary under the principle of the fair implementation of the rule of law, and a fundamentally stable economic infrastructure. Combined, these elements include aspects of each of Rotberg's "political goods" criteria for state strength.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Mexico."

⁷⁸ Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 3.

Regarding a representative democracy capable of fair elections, Grayson articulates the intricate political maneuverings that achieve a further differentiation and fractionalization of Mexican political parties.⁷⁹ However, this differentiation and fractionalization actually reflect symptoms of democratization inasmuch as it allows for the representation of diverging views without fear of retribution.⁸⁰ In fact, the development of the PAN, largely with the assistance of the Roman Catholic Church, and the subsequent election of Vicente Fox represented an expression of the Mexican people for a conservative-right, anti-corruption option with a renewed sense of hope for change.

President Fox engendered an expanded economic globalization as well as anti-corruption initiatives intended to assuage the anger of those who elected him in 2000. When the PRI continued to rotate new leadership in the 7 decades before, the elections lacked the feeling of renewal and hope that Huntington indicates as needed to maintain power. The disputed elections of 2009, the representation of seven major political parties in the bicameral Mexican government, and openly contested local, provincial, and national level elections reflect both the necessary participatory elements of democratization and the essential political good indicative of state strength.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Grayson further provides an elaborate play-by-play of political conditions to support his portrayal of Mexico as a fragile state. The final two chapters, “Chapter 10: Prospect for Mexico’s Becoming a Failed State,” and “Conclusion: Failed State?” attack the issue both from a sub-national and national perspective. For further detailed information about Grayson’s arguments on these topics see *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 251-278.

⁸⁰ Huntington outlines very descriptively the process of transformation and the characteristics of democratization. His points capture the importance of multiple views including those of hard liners and moderates in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 109-207.

⁸¹ Dan Lund, “Elecciones en Mexico, 2010 luchas timidas por el centro politico,” *Reporte de Opinión y Política* (Mexico City: MUND Americas, 2010). Lund provides detailed comparative analysis of the electoral conditions and election results within the province of Zacatecas as a microcosm of the propensity of modern Mexican politicians towards centrist ideas. This analysis supports Huntington’s participation concepts of democratization in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth*

As to a capable and largely professionalized military/security force structure responsive to civilian constituted authority, the Mexican military forces have observed a civil-military pact with the elected government of Mexico since the national rejection of post-revolutionary violence in 1946. Of the twenty Latin American nations, Mexico stands alone as the only one that did not suffer a military coup takeover of government in the twentieth century.⁸² The officer corps of the Mexican military consists mainly of the lower and middle classes. Each of the 3 military branches (the Air Force remains within the Army branch), have academies for the production of officers. These schools provide technical training in military sciences but do not provide university academic degrees. The Army, for example, has a preparatory school (la Escuela Militar Preparatoria), an academy (Escuela Militar Profesional), and a war college (Escuela Superior de Guerra) as part of institutional officer development.⁸³ Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) mainly focus on the training and recruiting of enlisted personnel. The Officers significantly outnumber the NCOs and assume most leadership roles within the service. Military pay still exceeds minimum wage, though enlisted personnel can work a second job.

As a function of the bilateral security cooperative agreement with the United States under President Calderón, Mexico now extradites wanted narco-criminals for prosecution and subsequent incarceration. Calderón's decision to extradite these criminals marks a significant departure from a longstanding precedent, highlights a weakness of the Mexican judiciary capability/credibility, and demonstrates his willingness to fully support the US National

Century, 109-207, and Rotberg's essential political goods thesis in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 5.

⁸² For details and information about the Mexican military, constitutional origins and usage authorizations, and for details about the organizational structure, see Jordi Díez and Ian Nicholls, *The Mexican Armed Forces in Transition* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 4.

⁸³ Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, "Historia II," October 2009, http://www.sedena.gob.mx/index.php?id_art=699 (accessed March 27, 2010).

Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy “building on ongoing cooperation and integrating efforts launched through the Merida Initiative.”⁸⁴ Calderón continues to articulate an increasingly aggressive stance against the drug cartel organizations despite the growing apprehension of the Mexican people. Despite this extension of cartel corruptive influence, the US judiciary prosecuted and incarcerated the largest number of drug criminals in 2009.⁸⁵ The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) also heralds dramatic declining trends within the decade from 1999 to 2009 in every drug category in terms of usage and positive drug test results.⁸⁶ Kevin Perkins, the Assistant Director of the Criminal Investigation Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), testified in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs that in 2009, 400 cases of public corruption, 100 arrests, and 130 state and federal prosecuted cases involving American officials originated from the Southwest border region of the United States.⁸⁷

The formidable security apparatus of Mexico responsive to a civilian elected government representative of the population provide a stabilizing element within Mexico. Mexico recognizes

⁸⁴ Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*, June 2009, 2. The NSWBCS contains the comprehensive US strategy to counter the drug threat along the US Southwest border. The strategy includes a wide range of strategic objectives focused on the physical and psychological realms with emphasis on the ongoing cooperation and collaboration with the Mexican government. Chapter 9 specifically details the strategic interaction with the Mexican government across the 4 instruments of national power.

⁸⁵ Raymond Foster, “Alleged Mexican Drug Cartel Leader Extradited from Mexico to Face Federal Drug Trafficking Charges,” *Criminal Justice Online*, entry posted February 10, 2010, <http://criminal-justice-online.blogspot.com/2010/02/alleged-mexican-drug-cartel-leader.html> (accessed March 13, 2010).

⁸⁶ US Drug Enforcement Administration, *Successes in the Fight Against Drugs: Impact on Demand 1999-2009*, Office of Public Affairs, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington D.C., January 2010

⁸⁷ Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *The Statement of Kevin L. Perkins*, “The New Border War: Corruption of US Officials by Drug Cartels,” on March 11, 2010, to the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector Preparedness and Integration, 1.

the importance of the struggle with drug cartel organizations coupled with a willingness to cooperate with the United States in executing a counter-drug strategy. Calderón demonstrated his commitment to strategic success against the cartel organizations by compromising key elements of sovereignty and allowing the extradition of Mexican citizens to the US judicial system.

Among the numerous articles deploring the security conditions in Mexico that dominate the communications environment, Alexandra Olson, an Associate Press writer for the *El Paso Times*, provides perspective concerning today's drug-related murder rate in Mexico, "Mexico City's homicide rate today is about on par with Los Angeles and is less than a third of that for Washington, D.C." According to Olson, in the past 10 years the murder rate decreased. In fact, the murder rate per 100,000 citizens of Mexico represents only one third that of other Latin American countries like Guatemala or Venezuela and only half that of Colombia. In the most recent global statistics, Mexico only reflects a mere 2.4 percent of total crime in the world compared to 18.6 percent from the United States. In terms of murder, Mexico ranks sixth in the world after India, Russia, Colombia, South Africa and the United States.⁸⁸ Luis de la Barreda, the Director General of el Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad a.c. (IESCI) or The Citizen's Institute for Insecurity states in Olson's article, "In terms of security, we are like those women who aren't overweight but when they look in the mirror, they think they're fat. We are an unsafe country, but we think we are much more unsafe than we really are."⁸⁹

According to the Failed State Index for 2009 by Foreign Policy and the Fund for Peace, Mexico rates as number 105 of 177, well above nations such as Russia, Venezuela, China, Egypt,

⁸⁸ NationMaster, "Crime Statistics," NationMaster.com, 2008, http://www.nationmaster.com/red/pie/crime_tot_cri-crime-total-crimes (accessed March 27, 2010).

⁸⁹ Alexandra Olson, "Amid Drug War, Mexico Less Deadly Than Decade Ago," *The El Paso Times*, http://www.elpasotimes.com/texas/ci_14353710, February 7, 2010 (Accessed March 13, 2010).

or Israel.⁹⁰ When looking at the sub-areas studied within this index, Mexico appears in the top 33 percent of all measured nations regardless of the category to include overall economic decline, de-legitimization of the state, public services, and the nation's security apparatus. Foreign Policy and the Fund for Peace recognize an actual overall improvement in Mexico in the past three years while recognizing the internal criminal troubles associated with drugs.⁹¹

Mexico has the 12th largest world economy in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and purchasing power parity (PPP), just ahead of Spain, South Korea and Canada and currently holds the position as the second largest trade partner, just ahead of China and just behind Canada, to the United States.⁹² The World Bank ranks Mexico as the second largest economy in Latin America to Brazil.⁹³ With \$1.4 trillion in GDP, Mexico's economy falls just shy of California in terms of PPP. These figures only account for the licit economic measures within the country. These indicators also support the argument that Mexico enjoys relative stability macro-economically.

Calderón took an offensive mindset to his war on drugs. Because of his aggressive actions the casualty rates continue to increase, though so too do the number of captures, convictions, and fractionalizations of the cartels. Coupled with US support and financing,

⁹⁰ Foreign Policy, "Failed States Index 2009," http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings, (accessed March 16, 2010).

⁹¹ The Fund for Peace, "Country Profiles: Mexico," http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=442&Itemid=889, last updated January 26, 2010 (accessed March 16, 2010).

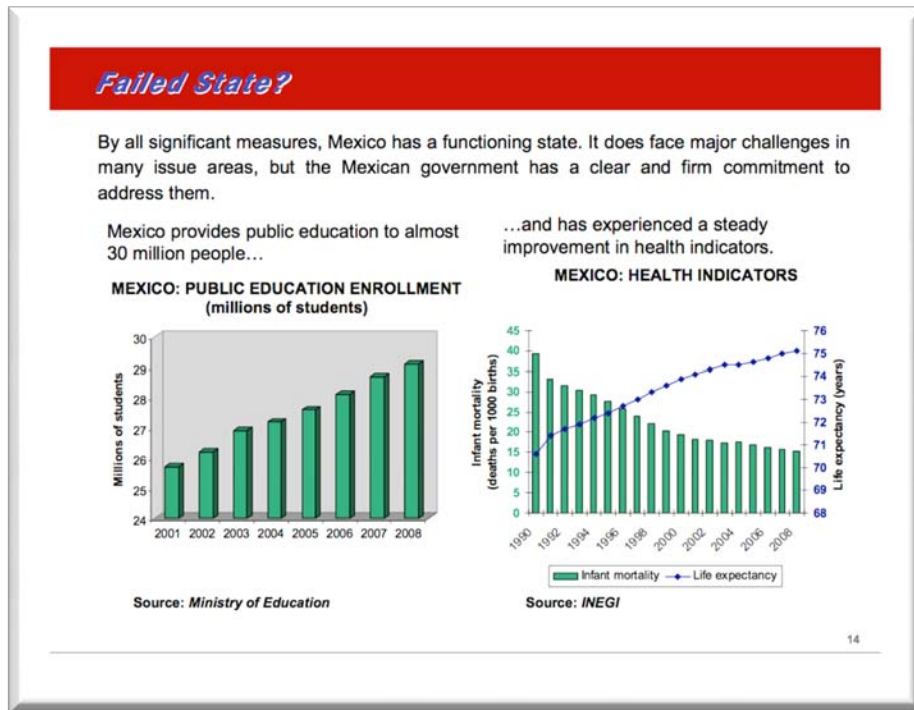
⁹² Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Mexico," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html?countryName=Mexico&countryCode=mx®ionCode=na&rank=12#mx>, (accessed March 16, 2010).

⁹³ The World Bank, "Country Brief: Mexico," <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/MEXICOEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22252113~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:338397,00.html>, (accessed March 16, 2010).

Calderón's strategy caused the cartel organizations to adjust their methods of conducting business. Increasingly violent, the cartels demonstrate either a renewed aggression or desperation. The cartels have re-organized, now inclusive of international (South American and Asian) influences as they continue to meet the sustained demand for drugs in the United States.

Concerning the delivery of other political goods and essential services, Mexico indicates improvement in both public education enrollment and overall health services. While attempting to address US concerns about the strength and status of Mexico, the Mexican Ambassador provided a presentation to the US government in Washington D.C. entitled "Mexico and the Fight Against Drug-Trafficking and Organized Crime: Setting the Record Straight" in March of 2009 effectively illustrate the point of Mexico's continued success in providing essential services to its people (see Figure 2).⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Mexican Embassy to the United States, "Mexico and the Fight Against Drug-Trafficking and Organized Crime: Setting the Record Straight," Mexican Foreign Ministry, March 2009, <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/eua/pdf/SettingTheRecordStraightFinal.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2010).



(Figure 2. Failed State?, Mexican Ambassador Briefing)

The left side of the figure clearly indicates the increased enrollment and provision of education to Mexican youth, while the graphic on the right contrasts the life expectancy increase trend to the decreasing infant mortality rate. These statistics-based graphs articulate positive trends within the other political goods of Rotberg’s criteria as the delivery of essential services.

Societal Factors

Rotberg indicates a peripheral nature to societal elements that possibly contribute to state failure, but do not serve as a “root causes.”⁹⁵ In the context of Mexico, even overwhelmingly homogenous elements likely have little impact on the overall strength of Mexico as a state. This

⁹⁵ Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 5.

section explores what, if any, influence other societal factors such as language, religion, or ethnicity play in state strength or failure to articulate why they do or do not support state strength.

Mexicans overwhelmingly speak a homophonic dialect of Spanish, though many southern Mexicans also speak various dialects.⁹⁶ Areas in southern Mexico speak an Andean or Indian variant while areas around Mexico City speak in a dialect more like Nahuatl with Aztec influence. While Northern regions along the border include significant English influences. Regardless, Mexicans conduct all commerce, official business, and education in Spanish. Sociolinguistics studies conducted by Ronald Worldbaugh and others articulate the unifying affect of language on society.⁹⁷ However, a homophonic language has not, historically, proven enough to sustain a state such as Somalia where an overwhelming majority of citizens speak Somali, yet the country endures anarchy as a collapsed state.

Similarly, nearly 88 percent of Mexicans are Roman Catholic.⁹⁸ Roman Catholicism served as an enormous societal influencer throughout the history of Mexico since Spanish missionaries originally set out to convert the New World. The modern Roman Catholic Church leveraged the political environment leading up to the elections in 2000 by supporting and endorsing the PAN to consistent with Catholic conservative moral imperatives. The Church remains foundationally important to the lives of devout Mexicans. Though cartels and the

⁹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Mexico,” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html?countryName=Mexico&countryCode=mx®ionCode=na&rank=12#mx>, (accessed March 16, 2010).

⁹⁷ Ronald Worldbaugh. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 25-52.

⁹⁸ Instituto Nacional De Estadística y Geografía, “Mexico: Porcentaje de la Población Católica, 1895 a 2000,” <http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contendos/espanol/sistemas/cgpv2000/religion/rel01.asp?s=est&c=11938>, (accessed May 3, 2010).

underworld of illicit activities support the emerging concepts of Santa Muerte, a supposed patron saint of the criminals, Roman Catholicism can still stir the general population to serve a more moralistic ideal. Santa Muerte concepts remain faddish and rebellious and not largely accepted by the general population. Unfortunately, a largely homogenous religion also does little to ensure state stability and strength as proven by the number of largely Muslim failed states.

Joseph Contreras describes a striking social phenomenon ongoing in Mexican society that he calls “Americanization” while depicting the staunch resistance by a preponderance of Mexicans as a backlash to this social incursion. Contreras attributes this resistance to a troubled history of incursion, conflict, and exploitation from the perspective of the Mexican people.⁹⁹

These societal factors could easily include a minimally fractionalized ethnicity, high standard of education, food, clothing, music among other elements of human terrain but ultimately and historically they do not determine state strength or weakness; rather, at best they only peripherally contribute to state stability or failure, though tipping in favor of stability. Counterexamples, especially in several Muslim or Asian nations exemplify the point that such social and cultural elements do not prevent state weakness or failure.

Democracy Emergence

Discussing the democratization of Mexico requires an expansion of historical scope. Though the election of President Fox marks a recent tectonic shift in the political landscape of Mexico, it marked only the most recent significant movement towards a more representative democracy. As mentioned before, the Mexican government went through approximately 70 years of rule under a single party. The PRI, born from socialistic reformist beginnings by former Army

⁹⁹ Contreras, *In the Shadow of the Giant: The Americanization of Mexico*.

generals, enabled longevity by implementing a “no re-election” political strategy.¹⁰⁰ This strategy ensured that whatever candidate emerged at the party’s convention ascended to the Presidency against weak competition. The new President knew that his administration would only serve for a single six-year term without re-election. These limitations engendered a cyclical changeover in party leadership.

The PRI leveraged this continuous change by alternating between progressive and conservative Presidents. By alternating between political philosophies, the party managed to alleviate most of the Mexican concerns enough to maintain at least a semblance of stability within a concept of what Huntington referred to as “political adaptability.”¹⁰¹ As time went on, the government policies, especially those dealing with the nation’s economy, further socialized the nation to the extent that the population increasingly relied on the government. The government, riding periods of economic growth and stagnation, adjoined and reconciled with large union organizations ranging from agrarian to industrial with organizations such as the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM). Unfortunately, at times, the PRI found it necessary to use violence to coerce or intimidate their opposition while increasingly infecting seats of government with politicians beholden to, or willingly to engage with, powerful cartel organizations.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 315-324.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² For a detailed look at the PRI and the Mexican political environment during the 2000 election time see Jorge Alonso, “The PRI’s Agenda: Manipulation, Corruption and Violence,” *Revista Envío*, no. 225, April 2000, (Central America University, 2000), <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1415> (accessed April 11, 2010). Alonso is a researcher with the Centro de Investigaciones

Democracies center on elections to identify and empower their “highest political decision-makers.”¹⁰³ Democratic governments, Huntington argues, must exist from free, fair, honest, and periodic elections where candidates openly compete.¹⁰⁴ Huntington refers to these essential elements of democracy as “contestation and participation.” The power of the vote as an expression of the will of the people empowers political leaders within democracies to engage or enact policies reflective of that will or for the general need, often referred to as the “greater good.” Huntington posits that single party systems like the one that predominated Mexican government, often achieve a “high level of political institutionalization,”¹⁰⁵ due to a heavy leverage of ideology.¹⁰⁶

The Mexican political system reformed in 1989 at the tail end of what Huntington refers to the “Third Wave of Democratization.”¹⁰⁷ The evolution of Mexican politics from a single-party system stemmed from a progression of electoral reforms that started in 1988 that mainly involved the transparency of the financing of political parties.¹⁰⁸ In October of 1990, Mexico created the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) as a result of the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) passed in August 1990.¹⁰⁹ The IFE website articulates the institutes mission as “in charge of organizing federal elections, that is, the election of President of the United Mexican States and Lower and Upper Chamber members that constitute the Union

¹⁰³ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁰⁸ Alonso Lujambio, “Funding and Fiscal Control of Parties in Mexico,” *Instituto Federal Electoral*, Mexico City, http://www.ife.org.mx/documentos/AI/elecMex5/funding_fiscal.html (accessed April 11, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Instituto Federal Electoral. “IFE: Nature and Attributions,” *Instituto Federal Electoral*, http://www.ife.org.mx/portal/site/ifev2/IFE_Nature_and_Attributions/#1 (accessed April 11, 2010).

Congress.”¹¹⁰ Theoretically, this over-watch organization created the freeness and fairness necessary to achieve democratization.

In discussing democratization, Huntington identifies the Roman Catholic Church as a large “force” in pushing countries towards democracy mainly due to its rejection of violence.¹¹¹ Though not an indicator of state strength or failure as previously argued, the Church as an agent within the process of democratization in Mexico makes sense given the overwhelming majority of Catholics in Mexico. From the beginning of the PRI, General Cardenas adopted a pugilistic posture with the perceived excesses and wealth of the Catholic Church of the 1920s. Despite the socialistic tendencies of liberation theology within Latin American Catholicism often exploited in South America, Mexican Catholic representatives assisted in forming the PAN with intentions of recovering prominence in Mexico while seeking to achieve moral imperatives associated with church teachings.

In summary, the recent responsiveness of politicians in Mexico to the influences within the political environment, notably the electoral reformations, over-watch institutions, emergence of national political parties, and social/religious actors represent Mexican political adaptability. This adaptability reflects an evolution born of what Huntington calls “political modernization.”¹¹² The assurances of a fair elections provide the most glaring advancement in the democratization process of Mexico as they serve to reflect the people’s will. The responsiveness and adaptability of political leaders answerable to the population represents the driving power behind President Calderón’s aggressive fight against the drug cartels, or his perceived vision of what is in the best interest of the greater good of Mexico and its people.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 201.

¹¹² Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 32-92.

Conclusion

Returning to Rotberg's criteria for determining the strengths of states based upon their ability to provide political goods, while Mexico fails to provide security in large areas of the country, it does apply a uniform rule of law, enables the populace to participate in free and fair elections, and provides essential services to the population. Though it faces significant economic challenges, an ongoing struggle with transnational organized criminal organizations, and increasing electorate apathy, Mexico will not fail.

Mexico currently lacks the ability to effectively prevent border infiltration, struggles to neutralize or eliminate the domestic criminal threat to its social structure, and cannot prevent violent crimes that endanger the human security of many Mexicans. However, Mexican citizens can generally expect accessibility to the judicial system without threat of government reprisal. The Mexican judicial system enables citizens to resolve their differences between each other or with the government without retribution or intimidation. Consistent with Rotberg's concept of a "predictable, recognizable, systematized methods of adjudicating disputes," the Mexican judicial system, enhanced by leveraging extradition to the US judiciary, continues to enforce a rule of law as an embodiment of the values of the people.¹¹³ The Mexican government's struggle to enforce law and exert control over sovereign territory meet a fundamental purpose of governance.

The Mexican military and security forces, branches of the executive branch of government with a long tradition of domestic stabilization and an early history of political power, enjoy the respect of the people, institutionally professionalize, and respond to the constituted authority of elected civilian leaders. Out-resourced and underequipped, these forces struggle to establish control and achieve the delicate balance between policing a state and a police state.

¹¹³ Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, 3.

The Mexican economy demonstrates durability, diversity and resiliency as the second largest trading partner to the United States. Largely due to the ongoing continued efforts at globalization and in no small part due to previous free trade status with the US, the Mexican economy will achieve growth on pace or ahead of the US. Wealth distribution inequities with Mexican society will continue to produce internal tensions, but do not represent a threat to national economic progress.

With increased enrollment in education, increased life expectancy, decreased infant mortality, and modern public transportation, energy, and medical care systems, Mexico provides essential services to its citizens. Other characteristics identified by Rotberg also provided by Mexico for its citizens include: roads, railways, harbors, arteries of commerce, communications networks, and a banking system. The overwhelming empirical evidence supports the finding that Mexico will not fail and that the narco-criminal violence evidenced within Mexico reflects a reformist government's attempts to exert strength by establishing sovereignty and governance with a monopoly on the use of violence.

Mexico has a complex criminal problem. The drug cartel organizations evolved and currently permeate legitimate elements of Mexican society with expanded international networks. Though the cartels operate among the Mexican people, the people still regard the cartel organizations negatively. Though overwhelmingly poor, the people continue to try to achieve altruistic reform and achieve a society void of opportunistic and greedy criminals. Drug crime in Mexico, and the violence associated with it, does not reflect an insurgency movement.

As the aggressive tactics of a reformist President stir the proverbial hornets nests within certain regions of Mexico, the increase in violence will likely increase. Calderón's clear-hold-build strategy continues to achieve results on both sides of the border, both in terms of captured or eliminated cartel members, and in increased and successful prosecutions of narco-criminals,

especially in the United States. Metrics of Calderón's success or failure do not include the number of those killed in drug related crime. Rather, more appropriately, President Calderón measurement of success centers on his ability to convince and maintain credibility with both the Mexican people and the international community that his aggressive efforts will achieve a stable and secure environment within a highly competitive new media information environment rife with counter-messaging of instability, violence, and potential state failure.

The close election of Calderón represented the exertion of the cartel political power as they strove to re-acquire positions of power within government. Calderón, however, prevailed and decided to exert even more pressure on the cartels to the eventual tune of approximately 50,000 troops and police to combat the drug networks. This pressure caused cartels to react with both increased number and ferocity of attacks on all elements, the citizens, police, military, judiciary and politicians. With the increased focus on the problem of cartel organizations and their violent reactions, US media, especially those from the border regions, leverage the spectacular nature of the deaths to agitate the US citizenry to the point of contemplating Mexico as a failed state.

Mexico exhibits all the necessary traits of a young and struggling democracy that, without significant support, could easily fall back into previous semi-authoritarian practices that would embolden and further enable cartels to operate beyond the influence of the Mexican government. However, a return to a semi-authoritarian, or even an authoritarian government does not mean the state will fail.

The 400+ cases of corruption within US agencies emerged from within the US system. These officials, possibly beholden to Mexican cartels, stand accountable for their own actions. They operated within our systems. Likewise, the market for illegal drugs stems from a prevalent US hunger for the substances. Most of the weapons used in the narco-violence originate from the

US. Still, American citizens living in Washington D.C., statistically and proportionately, are more likely to die from murder than will a Mexican citizen. While the Mexican economy, about the size of California, shows more promise of emerging from the global recession.

The ongoing drug-related violence in the northern regions of Mexico and the Southwest border regions of the United States indicate Mexican state weakness in the area of security, but falls well short of indicating that Mexico will fail. The violence epitomizes the will of the people carried out by a duly and truly democratically elected government against a powerful system of opposition. Lacking any desire to replace the current government, the cartel organizations respond to the deliberate pressures of the Mexican government with coercive intimidation and heightened violence in an effort to outlast the will of the government and continue to engage in lucrative illegal activity. As the democratic government continues to conduct aggressive counterdrug operations on behalf of the Mexican people, this violence will also continue.

The current security conditions in Mexico, rather than representing a fragile or failing state, provide an opportunity for Mexico's full emergence as a strong democracy, a strategic regional partner, and an important economic ally to the US. The amount of violence indicates the amount of neglect and disregard for cartel proliferation during previous administrations. The criminal problem appears to have penetrated both licit and illicit systems within Mexican society.

Mexico has gradually democratized since the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Evolving from military authoritarianism to reform minded single-party rule and finally to a multi-party free election, the evolution has not been without struggle, turmoil, or violence. The current struggle for power and influence between the Mexican government and criminal entities or organizations will test the power of the current system. The resolve of the Mexican people, reflective in free and fair elections will determine the viability of the government. That Mexico could fail would require the unlikely deterioration of several currently strong elements of government to include

the military, economy and judiciary. If the government remains able to maintain the support of the population and with increased indirect assistance from the US, Mexico will emerge from the current security struggle stronger and better from it. To believe otherwise either reflects a myopic and biased view of the facts, or a lack of understanding of the complex system that is Mexico.

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